

Conceptual Distinctions and Transformations of “Zajia” Editors in the Media Convergence Era: Post-Print

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Abstract

Compared with the print media era, the knowledge supply environment, publication formats, and editorial work content in the converged media era have all undergone profound transformations, and the connotation of the editor’s “polymath” concept must likewise be re-examined and updated. The “poly-” in polymath should no longer emphasize breadth of knowledge, but should instead underscore the ability to command different media and modes of expression—namely, converged media publishing capability—thus becoming a “new polymath” of “two specializations and one poly-” .

Full Text

The Editorial “Zajia” Concept in the Converged Media Era: Re-examination and Evolution

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Abstract: Compared with the print media era, the knowledge supply environment, publication formats, and editorial work content in the converged media era have undergone transformative changes, necessitating a re-examination and updating of the “zajia” concept for editors. The essence of “za” (diversity) no longer lies in encyclopedic knowledge but rather in the ability to master different media and modes of expression—that is, converged media publishing capabilities. Editors must become “new zajia” characterized by “two specializations and one diversity.”

Keywords: converged media era; editor; “zajia” ; media convergence; talent cultivation

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The phrase “editors are zajia” vividly captures certain requirements of publishing work for editorial competence and has become deeply ingrained and widely circulated in the publishing industry. However, conceptual examination cannot be divorced from historical context. In the half-century since this notion emerged, the information and communication environment has changed beyond recognition, and the objects of editorial work have also undergone multifaceted transformations. Does this metaphor for editorial subjects require re-examination and updating? What kind of “zajia” should editors become in today’s converged media era? These are questions worthy of in-depth exploration.

1. Historical Examination of the “Zajia” Concept

1.1 Background of the Editorial Zajia Concept

The term “zajia” originally referred to one of the Hundred Schools of Thought in ancient China. Ban Gu’s *Book of Han: Treatise on Literature* states: “The Zajia school originated from officials who mediated discussions. It synthesizes Confucianism and Mohism, integrates logic and law, understands the necessity of these for statecraft, and perceives their universal applicability in governance—this is its strength.” Here, “za” means synthesis and amalgamation.

The earliest textual comparison of editors to “zajia” appeared in the 1960s. In May 1962, Luo Zhufeng wrote “Zajia—Thoughts from an Editor,” which gained significant influence in cultural and publishing circles through endorsement by renowned figures like Ye Shengtao and Sun Li. In this context, “zajia” referred to individuals with extensive knowledge. As Luo Zhufeng noted, to be a true editor, one must possess broad knowledge; only through being “za” (diverse) can one shoulder heavy responsibilities. This perspective was inseparable from the social context of the time, when knowledge production efficiency was low, information channels were limited, and publishing houses were understaffed, naturally requiring versatile “all-rounders” who could handle topics across multiple domains.

1.2 Development of the Editorial Zajia Concept

With the advent of the information age, editorial work environments and content changed, and expectations for the “za” in “zajia” also quietly evolved, manifesting primarily in two aspects.

1.2.1 From Emphasizing Knowledge Stock to Knowledge Increment

Some scholars have observed that “the refinement of disciplines and specialties and the mutual penetration between multi-disciplinary fields have increasingly complicated editors’ work objects, requiring editors to continuously broaden their knowledge, stay informed about cutting-edge academic information, and

constantly update their knowledge to expand the breadth of ‘zajia’ and adapt to continuously evolving modern editorial work. To truly become a ‘zajia’ is not easy; one must establish lifelong learning as a philosophy, cultivate diverse interests, and learn while applying, applying while learning.” Although this statement essentially still emphasizes knowledge scope, subtle changes have emerged. The requirements for “zajia” now stress self-learning awareness and capability, focusing on “continuous renewal” and “continuous development” —that is, dynamic incremental capacity rather than static knowledge stock. This represents significant progress.

1.2.2 From Emphasizing Knowledge Itself to Comprehensive Abilities

Following the recovery and development of the publishing industry, market competition intensified, and editorial work expanded from manuscript acquisition and processing to full-process planning and service. The industry gradually recognized that editors need strong comprehensive abilities to be “zajia.” Consequently, the connotation of “za” quietly transformed again. As *The Power of Editing* states, editors must be “general managers of miscellaneous tasks.” Here, “za” expanded considerably to emphasize comprehensive abilities. Only with such capabilities can one become a mature editor capable of working independently. This shift from emphasizing knowledge to emphasizing abilities undoubtedly represents another step forward.

2. Changes and Constants of the Editorial “Zajia” Concept in the Converged Media Era

The proposal and development of the editorial “zajia” concept primarily relate to two factors: changes in the knowledge supply environment and expansion of work content. Regarding knowledge supply, we have evolved from knowledge scarcity in the 1960s-70s through the knowledge explosion of the new century to today’s information surplus in the internet, especially mobile internet era. Editors can now conveniently access materials and verify information. Regarding work content, in the print publishing era, editors produced basically single-format products—paper books and journals—with predetermined media forms, leaving little room for maneuvering in media formats. Work focused primarily on content control. Today, however, we are in the converged media era, where single pieces of content often require multi-media dissemination and presentation through different modes of expression. “Publications must adapt from unidirectional to multi-directional interactive communication.”

In this context, for editors to become qualified “zajia,” the requirements behind the term “za” must advance with the times. Generally speaking, in the converged media era, whether editors are “za” in terms of knowledge scope has become less important; instead, we should emphasize “specialization.” The “za” of editors should further stress comprehensive abilities, particularly the capacity to master different media and modes of expression. I propose summarizing this as “two specializations and one diversity.”

2.1 “Two Specializations and One Diversity”: Subject Matter Expert + Specialized Editorial Expert + Master of Multiple Media

First, the converged media era increasingly demands that editors become subject matter experts. As Wu Peihua, Chief Editor of Tsinghua University Press, stated at the 6nd Taofen Publishing Talent Forum: “The traditional view holds that editors are *zajia* requiring broad knowledge, which remains correct because editors need to handle various manuscripts, even within the same discipline which contains many subfields. However, in the internet era, with the help of powerful search engines, the requirement for broad and diverse knowledge has become secondary. Today we need specialists—dedicated professionals in specific subject areas. This is particularly necessary in specialized publishing fields.” Of course, for individual editors as “terminals” to access valuable information from the “cloud” anytime, the prerequisite is having “high bandwidth.” Therefore, we must emphasize that broad and diverse knowledge becomes secondary only when editors possess strong information literacy, being adept at discovering, evaluating, and integrating information. Any assessment of editorial competence that ignores this prerequisite will be flawed.

Second, in the converged media era, editors’ specialized knowledge and fundamental skills must be strengthened, not weakened. Editing is a professional discipline and an important category in the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security’ s professional technical position system. Editors must reinforce their core competencies: gatekeeping awareness, discerning vision, integration capability, and communication drive. Only with such professional competence can they fulfill the basic functions of editorial activities—discovery, selection, and optimized dissemination. As senior editorial scholars have noted, “Editors should first specialize in editorial studies and publishing studies.” It is particularly worth noting that editors’ fundamental skills currently face widespread weakening. “For young editors today, to become specialized talents, the primary and urgent issue is fundamental skills,” including command of language and writing, gatekeeping political and religious expressions, and mastery of editorial standards. These constitute the most basic prerequisites for excellent editors.

Third, if editors make wedding clothes for others, then in the converged media era, knowing how to make only one style is far from sufficient. Today, when encountering valuable ideas, new knowledge, or good stories, editors must contemplate not just how to produce a book but also consider: first, from the user’ s perspective, how many communication methods are needed to perfectly present the idea/knowledge/story and optimize user experience; second, from the publisher’ s perspective, how to maximize the value of this content by developing multi-media, serial products or services to maximize publishing institutions’ benefits. In other words, editors in the converged media environment need to conduct “integrated” planning, “facing the same topic, planning according to multiple media formats to achieve deep expansion of media product value and diversified media business innovation.”

This multi-media awareness is necessary not only during planning but also throughout content review and processing. As media studies teaches, when information passes through channels, it requires suitable modes of expression—this is part of what Marshall McLuhan meant by “the medium is the message.” Having worked as a book editor, audio-visual editor, and internet product designer, I deeply appreciate this. For example, the same story requires re-expression adapted to the medium when transformed from text to audio-visual format, and again when presented as interactive games on platforms—not simple content transfer.

The same applies to operations and promotion. Editors in the new era must adapt to converged media trends, expand integrated operations and all-media marketing, emphasize online-offline complementarity and cross-promotion, and facilitate mutual benefit and symbiosis among different media.

3. Recommendations for Cultivating New “Zajia”

Regardless of industry, the key question that must be answered is what kind of talent is needed and how to cultivate it. The “zajia” metaphor, being accessible, vivid, and familiar, has been widely accepted. If we can expand its connotation to adapt to the characteristics and development needs of editorial work in the converged media era, and purposefully cultivate talent accordingly, it will undoubtedly contribute to building a strong editorial workforce.

3.1 New Approaches in University Editorial Publishing Education

University education constitutes an important source of editorial publishing talent. Educational researchers have recognized that we must reconsider the positioning of talent cultivation objectives for converged media editors. “Facing the industry development trends of globalization, digitization, and internetization, China’s editorial publishing education is encountering unprecedented challenges, among which the reconstruction of talent cultivation objectives has become key to the success or failure of entire editorial publishing education.” Based on cultivating new “zajia,” how to design curricula and arrange practical education is a major topic worthy of in-depth research. I will not elaborate further here but offer three preliminary suggestions.

3.1.1 Strengthen Multi-Media Learning and Practice Since the new communication environment features all-media communication and converged media publishing, we must adapt to this trend by cultivating students’ relevant awareness and capabilities. On one hand, classroom teaching should examine the characteristics of different media, especially new media. On the other hand, we must increase students’ practical opportunities to engage with multiple new media, enabling them to learn swimming in the pool rather than practicing on paper. Universities that offer editorial publishing programs and have affiliated presses possess unique advantages in this regard. They can “transform the

university media system, including university presses, into incubators for all-media talent cultivation,” fully leveraging the advantage of comprehensive media formats within university media systems to provide students with more practical opportunities.

3.1.2 Strengthen General Editorial Science and Media Studies Education Against the backdrop of media convergence, the media objects editors face are becoming increasingly diversified while boundaries become increasingly blurred. Therefore, we need to pay greater attention to “general editorial science” that studies the common laws of editorial activities across various media, further deepening our understanding of the fundamental laws of editorial activities. Correspondingly, teaching should increase its weight to enable students to master the general and basic laws of editing early on. Simultaneously, students should be able to transcend editorial perspectives and examine the role of media in information dissemination and cultural inheritance from the perspective of culture-technology interaction. Strengthening media studies education will also help students understand media and grasp editorial work in the converged media era.

3.1.3 Strengthen “Editorial Thinking” Education If the first suggestion aims to help students experience technological development and the second aims to help them grasp it, this suggestion hopes to cultivate students’ vision and capabilities that transcend media and technology. Editorial thinking is “the concepts and original insights of editorial subjects, representing editors’ understanding of objective editorial work, including criteria for material selection, editorial style choices, and overall design concepts.” With thinking, editors can grasp essentials amid dazzling technological changes rather than constantly chasing technology. I recommend that university editorial publishing programs, while strengthening research and teaching on new media and new communication, also cast their gaze toward history, toward master editors, and toward editorial thinking, seeking those illuminating ideas that can guide publishers regardless of how the communication environment changes.

3.2 New Approaches in Industry Talent Evaluation and Continuing Education

Besides formally trained professionals, a significant portion of editorial publishing talent comes from other fields, and even formally trained editors must continue learning after entering the industry. To cultivate new “zajia,” what orientation, environment, and support should be provided? This is something that relevant authorities and publishing institutions should consider. I offer two preliminary suggestions.

3.2.1 In Talent Evaluation, Strengthen Orientation Toward Converged Media Editorial Abilities Currently, the primary talent evaluation

mechanism in the editorial publishing field is the review of professional technical titles. In this review work, authorities have continuously strived to provide opportunities for converged media editors. For example, the National Press and Publication Administration's senior title review has created a separate category for "digital associate editor-in-chief/editor-in-chief" with preferential policies, while the Beijing Municipal Press and Publication Bureau has explored a "digital editor" title parallel to traditional publishing titles. However, specific evaluation standards still have limitations. For instance, application materials for digital associate editor-in-chief/editor-in-chief require digital publication topic reports, design and production plans, digital publication review opinions, and professional papers on digital publishing. Although these explicitly require "digital publishing," they remain primarily text-based materials, making it difficult to effectively evaluate candidates' achievements and capabilities in converged media work. I recommend further incorporating assessments of the quality of converged media products developed by applicants and user feedback metrics.

3.2.2 In Continuing Education, Provide Multi-Faceted Support

Against the backdrop of media convergence, editors' "knowledge anxiety" has become widespread, with converged media-related knowledge and capabilities being the most needed areas for improvement. This presents both an opportunity for developing continuing education for editors and new requirements for training management and curriculum design. On one hand, relevant administrative authorities should innovate and adapt, considering the specific practices of converged media in concrete regulations such as assessment methods and credit calculation standards. In terms of training formats, besides face-to-face and online courses, they should also consider recognizing practice, fieldwork, and technical aspects. On the other hand, we should cultivate editors beyond the confines of publishing. We can fully utilize training resources from enterprises and universities to enrich training content and formats, such as appropriately delegating to dynamic and creative emerging media organizations. Their practical courses and lectures can compensate for deficiencies in continuing education content for editors.

In summary, the converged media era requires a new type of editorial "zajia," with the most prominent change being editors' need for the ability to "synthesize and integrate" multiple media and master various modes of expression. We should first recognize at the cognitive level the new demands that the era places on editorial capabilities, identify key and emerging issues, and invest meticulous effort in talent evaluation and cultivation practices. By overcoming existing mental inertia and management models, we can cultivate new "zajia" suited to the new era.

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Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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